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SUBJECT: SOUTH SULAWESI: MORE YAWNING, LESS YELLING WHILE GOLKAR
SLIPS AGAIN IN ELECTIONS

REF: 07 SURABAYA 72

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11. (SBU) Summary: The 2009 Legislative elections in South Sulawesi were marked by a dip in turnout and a generally orderly process. This was in stark contrast to the angry crowds held back by concertina wire following the hotly contested 2007 South Sulawesi governor's election. Early results show that Vice President Jusuf Kalla and his Golkar party, once dominant in this, his home province, still lead President Yudhoyono's Partai Demokrat (PD) but only by four percent -- a dramatic shift from 12004. This snapshot of elections in one province demonstrates that the world's third largest democracy can successfully hold elections in the face of considerable logistic challenges. End Summary

Golkar's Dominance Ebbs

12. (SBU) Over the last two years, Golkar's dominance in eastern Indonesia has gradually weakened. Corruption scandals and strategic missteps have further weakened Golkar in South Sulawesi, Vice President Kalla's own back yard (reftel). In 2004, Golkar dominated the polls in South Sulawesi's election to send legislators to parliament in Jakarta, garnering 41 percent more votes than PD. Today, Golkar's advantage is just four percent. (Golkar 22.35 percent, PD 18.89 percent). PD did even better in the local Makassar parliamentary contest, besting Golkar 22.6 to 19.2 percent respectively. The results of these legislative elections hold the promise of bringing more accountability to Indonesian politics with their focus on individual candidates rather than party lists. However, PD's success in South Sulawesi points to President Yudhoyono's popularity, rather than clear support for his party's policies.

Enthusiasm Varies

13. (SBU) Observations at polling stations in the provincial capital Makassar and the regency of Gowa showed some disparity in voter enthusiasm, but an overarching desire to conduct the elections according to new, if poorly understood regulations. One voter characterized the race as a "family and friends" affair, since much of the campaigning was door to door and people said that they were choosing someone accountable to them instead of a party.

14. (SBU) While villages and close-knit city neighborhoods seemed enthusiastic about the process, some wealthy voters were less impressed. Makassar media reported a 30 percent increase in domestic air ticket sales for travel over the four-day election holiday, which included Good Friday, a national holiday. Local advertisements for "voting vacation packages" suggested that many well-heeled residents saw the day as a vacation from voting. Turnout at polling stations in poorer areas was indeed higher according to Elections Commission officials and our own observations.

Counting Slowed by Sheer Size of Ballots

15. (SBU) Despite a 20 to 30 percent drop in participation in some parts of Makassar, voting and counting still moved slowly. Fresh logistical challenges brought on by new ballots and new rules meant that voters flowed through polling stations so slowly that eligible voters were sometimes turned away. Voters required a lot of instruction to use the newspaper-sized ballots -- four per voter for national and local legislatures. Contradictory instructions from the Elections commission about how to mark the ballot just added to the confusion. A requirement that tabulation be completed at polling stations immediately after polls closed meant that poll workers toiled late into the night. By 11 PM, poorly lit side streets in Makassar were still full of poll workers on folding chairs straining to confirm the marks on ballots before crowds of witnesses.

Cash and Stoves Get Votes

16. (SBU) The profusion of banners, signs and stickers for individual candidates throughout Indonesia proved the focus during this election had shifted from political parties toward

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individual politicians. While traditional Indonesian get-out-the-vote efforts like giving voters free t-shirts or simply buying votes persist, the impact is increasingly unclear. Voters admit they readily take gifts from candidates and parties they don't intend to support. Public policy did affect voter behavior, according to some working-class voters in Gowa. The central government's distribution of direct cash assistance and gas stoves in the weeks leading up to the election was key in swinging votes to President's Yudhoyono's party.

MCCLELLAND